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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

30 April 1965

SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 12-65

SUBJECT: Current Trends in Vietnam

1. During the past two months in Vietnam, some downward trends appear to have been checked, at least for the moment, and in a few cases even reversed. Nonetheless, the general outlook remains dreary and in some respects the dangers of the situation have increased.

2. Within South Vietnam governmental weakness and the possibility of military coups will continue. Although a greatly enlarged US presence and involvement has thus far boosted South Vietnamese morale and combativeness, this will continue only if our efforts are demonstrably effective. There will be constant danger that the war weary people of South Vietnam will let the US assume an even greater share of the fighting. There will also be danger that increased US troop commitment will lead more South Vietnamese to accept the Communist line that US colonialism is replacing French. This could turn increasing numbers of Vietnamese toward support of the Viet Cong effort to oust the US.

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Authority CIA 3/21/77, State 2/3/78
By RDE NARC, Date 4/10/78

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3. In any event, we stress that the essential elements of the equation of power in South Vietnam have not been altered significantly. There is an immediate danger of a new drive by the Viet Cong. The very factors which justify some cautious optimism on our part also point to the Viet Cong need for such a drive to re-establish their momentum. Their capabilities for enlarged military action are formidable: they have 38,000 to 46,000 hard-core regulars (perhaps more) and around 100,000 irregulars. MACV has recently confirmed the presence of a battalion of regular PAVN troops with the Viet Cong, and we believe that there are two more. Their concentration of forces in the northern part of South Vietnam gives them the capability of launching large-scale (for Vietnam) attacks on one or more of a number of important centers or bases. In this part of Vietnam, the interior will be frequently under cloud cover during the summer rainy season, while the coastal strip will be generally clear and dry and open to US/GVN air action. We believe, therefore, that a major Viet Cong military effort is more likely to be launched against Kontum, Pleiku, or some place in the interior, although it may be preceded by a diversionary attack on a coastal target. It is possible, however, that the Viet Cong will attempt to drive to the coast from their inland strongholds and cut South Vietnam in two.

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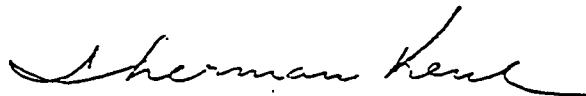
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4. The Viet Cong also have considerable military strength in the region 40 miles or so north of Saigon, and in the Southern delta areas, which could be used to whiplash ARVN forces between the north and south portions of South Vietnam. In addition, the Viet Cong could sharply step up their tactics of terrorism and sowing political confusion in both the countryside and the cities.

5. The Vietnam situation thus appears to be entering a critical phase. If, during the next few months, the Viet Cong can pull off one or more spectacular military victories, or if defeatism increases substantially in South Vietnam or if the political situation again deteriorates, the Communist effort in Vietnam would gain great momentum. If, on the other hand, a major Viet Cong military effort this summer is generally repulsed, the Viet Cong position would suffer substantially, with a corresponding increase in GVN morale and popular support. It is of course possible, though we believe it unlikely, that the Viet Cong will avoid a major engagement this summer because of supply difficulties and a desire to increase their build-up for combat at a later date.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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